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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000215

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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: NEW TWIST IN THE CALL FOR MINISTERS TO BE FIRED

REF: MASERU 194

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Summary  
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¶1. Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) Youth League members allegedly wrote a letter, dated June 6, 2009, which urged the Prime Minister to fire some cabinet ministers for incompetence. The letter has sparked controversy, as some sources accuse Mothetjoa Metsing, the Minister of Communications (who is also the Secretary General of the LCD), and two other Members of Parliament (MPs) of being the authors of the afore-mentioned letter. The letter was reportedly delivered to the Minister of Communications for onward transmission to Prime Minister (PM) Mosisili. Metsing and the two MPs denied the allegations and suggested that this accusation was merely intended to tarnish their images.

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Minister of Communications stirring the pot?  
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¶2. According to information dated June 22 on a local website news service, Intelserv, well placed sources inside the governing party have fingered Metsing, MP Keketso Rants'o, and MP Mahlomola Makhube of being the masterminds behind the Youth League's controversial letter. Earlier, media had reported that the letter was prepared by the LCD Youth League and delivered to the Minister Metsing because of his role as Secretary General of the LCD. Metsing and the two MPS have vehemently denied any involvement in the preparation of the memo. They asserted that whoever is pointing fingers at them has a hidden agenda and wants to bring their names into disrepute. Intelserv also revealed that another MP from the Koro-Koro Constituency was involved in sending text messages to Youth Leagues members' mobile phones informing them about a meeting at party headquarters to discuss "some urgent party business" regarding the petition to the PM.

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Divisions widening within the ruling party?  
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¶3. In yet another surprise move, the President of the LCD Youth League, Mosala Mojakisane, distanced the League and himself as President from the controversial letter. He stated that the Youth League Executive Committee had nothing to do with the petition. Local observers say that this move clearly demonstrates that there are two opposing camps within the governing LCD. Both Intelserv and the Lesotho Times issue of June 25 reported that the petition called on the PM to fire the following ministers for incompetence: Minister of Natural Resources, Monyane Moleleki; Minister of Local Government and Chieftainship Affairs, Dr. Pontso Sekatle; Minister of Gender

and Youth, Sports and Recreation, Mathabiso Lepono; Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Lesole Mokoma; Minister of Public Service, Semano Sekatle; and Minister of Forestry and Land Reclamation, Ralechate Mokose (reftel).

14. The June 26 issue of the Public Eye newspaper reported that the infamous memo also requested the PM to reshuffle the following ministers in addition to those already mentioned: Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Timothy Thahane; Minister of Education and Training, Dr. Mamphono Khaketla; Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr. Mphu Ramatlapeng; and Minister of Public Works and Transport, Tsele Chakela. Despite this indication of dissatisfaction on the part of some party members, Public Eye reported that at a June 14 rally in Butha Buthe, the PM showed total disregard for the infamous petition by extolling Moleleki's performance as a minister. He outlined Moleleki's achievements and cited rural electrification and revenue collected from the Lesotho Highlands Water Project as success stories. On the other hand, at the recent funeral of an MP who was killed in April, the PM publicly criticized the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security for failing to transform Lesotho's agricultural sector despite his high credentials as a leading agriculturalist.

15. Some local analysts believe the PM's statements are just meant for his domestic LCD audience. Professor Makoa, a political scientist from Lesotho, indicated that he was not at all surprised to hear the PM making such statements when addressing his followers. He said that the PM's statements must be seen in the context of the audience he was addressing. He warned that although the PM was clearly speaking to the public gallery, some party fanatics might take the PM's words to heart and seek to use his remarks to further their own agendas.

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Comment  
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16. The latest turn of events illustrates that there are some disgruntled elements within the LCD which would like to change the status quo. Well-placed Embassy sources had indicated earlier that the PM was planning to reshuffle his cabinet. However, in recent days, our sources have alleged that Mosisili is reluctant to proceed with his reshuffle plans because he fears that this would destabilize the party. Some local observers say the PM's statements criticizing or praising cabinet ministers could have unduly raised people's expectations that a cabinet re-shuffle was eminent. A clear example is the LCD Youth League's letter, which indicates that their expectations may have been raised and encouraged them to agitate for a cabinet reshuffle. According to Post's sources, the PM (who is on his third five-year term), has not revealed any clear succession plans. This lack of clarity for the future of the party frustrates potential future LCD leaders who may be vying for his position and widening rifts within the party. Local Government elections are set for April 2010; post will monitor how well the governing party manages to keep party unity until then.  
NOLAN